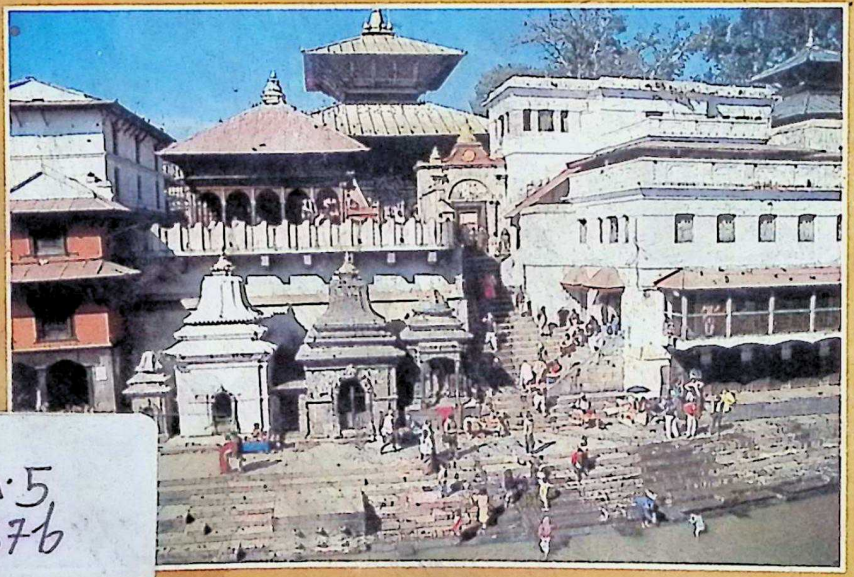
Brahmins of NEPAL



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Prakash A.Raj

उपहार

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BRAHMINS OF NEPAL

Prakash A. Raj

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Brahmins of Nepal

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PREFACE

In contrast to hill tribal groups such as Gurungs, Magars, Rais and Limbus, there has been little that is studied about Brahmins in Nepal by western social scientists. This is surprising in view of the fact that Brahmins are one of the most important dominant ethnic groups in Nepal and have contributed much during and after process of unification. They have played a historic role in popularizing Nepali language which is the national and link language throughout the country . They have also produced a large number of poets, litterateurs and grammarians far out of proportion in the population. They had also virtually monopolized the study of Sanskrit language for several hundred years in the subcontinent. The documents about the first ever school in Nepal has turned out to be a Sanskrit *Pathshala* which was in existence in the year 1840, even before the beginning of the Rana regime. The document which consists of a Royal Order or a *Lalmohar* lists the names and the annual salary of the six teachers and the code of conduct for the students. All of the teachers and probably all the students were Brahmins. They have continued to monopolize Sanskrit learning to this day.

As the newly emerging tribal groups and lower castes have been empowered and are asserting their identity, there is a considerable degree of anti-Brahmin feeling in Post- Popular Movement Nepal of the nineties. Such sentiments are demonstrated in attempts to declare Nepal as a secular state and in opposition to compulsory Sanskrit. One of the major factors behind the anti-Brahmin campaign is what has been understood as the disproportiate domination of the Brahmins in the political and administrative setup of Nepal. While there may be some truth in some of the allegations, most are totally lacking in truth. No study of political and social scene in Nepal will be complete without some understanding of Brahmins and their role in Nepal. I hope that this study will help reduce shortage of information on this important segment of the Nepalese society.

January 1997

Prakash A. Raj

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BRAHMINS IN NEPAL

Chhetris and Hill Brahmins constitute the most dominant section of the Nepalese society ever since unification which started in 1768. Although Chhetris (including Thakuris) were comparatively more important than the Brahmins. The great unifier Prithvi Narayan Shah and the royal family come from the Chhetri caste and they have also contributed an overwhelming percent of higher ranking army officials. According to one estimate [1], 70% of Senior army officials in Nepal were Chetris in the year 1967. On the other hand, hill Brahmins were important next only to the Chhetris. After the advent of democracy inn 1950 and more recently since the Popular Movement and restoration of democracy in 1990, the importance of Brahmins has increased in the political arena although they had played a domineering role in the administrative service and as school teachers. All of the Prime Minsters of Nepal in the period 1768 to 1950 were Chhetris with a sole exception of Ranga Nath Paudel, a Brahmin. However, only four Prime Ministers out of 14 in post-1950 era were Chhetris. There were nine Brahmin and only one Newar Prime Ministers. No person belonging to any ethnic group other than Chhetris, Brahmins and Newars has ever been made Prime Minster although there has been a token representation of Madhises from Terai and Janjatis from the hills in almost all of the cabinets formed since 1950.

According to Gaige [2] only Hill Brahmins and Chhetris are endowed with four characteristics which enable them to participate successfully in the Nepalese national political arena. These include: "control of economic resources, high caste status, identification of the hill culture and high level of educational attainment". It is interesting to note that the only non-Brahmin/Chhetri Prime Minister had Nepali as his mother tongue as is the case of many Newars who migrated from the Kathmandu Valley and settled in the remote hilly regions in the far eastern and far western parts of the country. Some writers [3] have said that the Nepalese national culture is the hill culture of Nepal, the culture dominated by Brahmin-Chhetri-Newar coalition. Some social scientists [4] have been more vocal in Brahmin-Chhetri domination by saying "The frequent aggravated sentiments of different ethnic groups regimented on ethnic or regional lives may be a fake political gimmick but recorded history of 200 years of Chhetri-Brahmin domination in the political, social and cultural life of Nepali people is not".

Actually, the disproportionate domination of Brahmins became a political issue after the first multi-party elections after Restoration of Democracy in 1990. A new word *Bahunbad* was coined to indicate such domination. One such article by K.P.Malla [5] is a typical example of such Brahmin baiting. He says:

There is no doubt that Brahmin community (the Parbate Brahmins) has been a very dominant element in the ethnic composition of not only Kathmandu valley but also Nepal as whole because of their traditional role and also their prerogative as literate clan occupying the highest ritual for the last 2000 years. .....Wherever there is Brahmin cultural influence, there had to be this kind of

stratification between the high and the low, the pure and the impure. This is the main contribution of the Brahmins to our society

This could be a sweeping illustration of generalization on Brahmins. Firstly, the Parbate Brahmins (hill Brahmins) have not been around in what is Nepal for 2000 years. Toni Hagen [6] the first foreigner to travel extensively in Nepal in the fifties found that in many parts of hilly region of Nepal, especially the west the Brahmin population had a lower standard of living than that of any other group. However, he found that Brahmins had position of influence in the towns.

Some of the western anthropoligists have been quite outspoken about the problem of ethnicity in Nepal and have made sweeping conclusions about "robbing of clan lands" by high caste Hindus arriving in 14th and 15th century. The term "high caste" means Chhetris and Brahmins. In one such book which is a doctorate thesis written for University of Heidelberg, Kramer[7] suggests that many non-Hindus were made "labourers, servants, bond agents and slaves and were exploited down to the subsistence level" and many of these people migrated to India.

A book entitled **Fatalism and Development** written by a Nepalese anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista[8] blamed Brahmins for lack of development in Nepal as they had introduced the caste system and Hindu fatalistic attitudes in Nepal. The book became quite popular in the west and had considerable influence on the West's perception of Nepal. This will be dealt in more detail at a later stage.

A considerable number of "ethnic" journals were published by some intellectuals of the *Janjatis* in post 1990 era. There was *Lafa* for the Magars, *Rodhi* for Gurungs and *Kairon* for Tamangs. One common characteristic of these journals was their attack on compulsary teaching of Sanskrit in the Nepalese schools and on the domination of Hindus in Nepal. They all had a distinct anti-Brahmin orientation.

An organization called *Janjati Mahasangaha* was formed in the period for the backward tribal groups. It advocated against celebrating *Dasain* festival, the biggest in Nepal which it said represented Hindu influence. According to an article published in *Lafa*, [9] entitled "What are the country's Magars saying", it asserted "Who owns the land where you are now standing. Our nationality has been raped by yesterday's refugees. Those who were making their living by reading palms and horoscopes are now playing parade over our heads..... Hindus who entered around the year 1192 have spread Hindu religion in place of Buddhism and have imposed Hinduism on Magars." *Janjati Mahasangha* campaigned against compulsary Sanskrit teaching in the schools. There were demands that the languages of the indegenious people should be medium of instruction in the schools. It was surprising that the language of the above journals was in Sanskritized Nepali and the name of the organization itself was one hundred percent Sanskrit. The name of many of its leaders had their origin in Sankrit or the Hindu deities.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Hill Brahmins are found in the hilly region at altitudes ranging from 500m to 2000m along the length of Nepal from Mechi to Mahakali Rivers and are rarely found living at higher altitudes. In accordance of pattern of migration from the hills to the Terai since the sixties when malaria was eradicated, a large number of hill Brahmins have also migrated. According to 1991 census 874,900 or 36.72% of total Hill Brahmin population was living in 19 districts of the Terai or the inner Terai. It is only in the districts of Terai between Kosi and Bagmati in the Mithila region that Terai Brahmins outnumber the Hill Brahmins.

In eastern hills, large concentration of hill Brahmins is found in the vicinity of Kathmandu and there are four districts including Kathmandu and three surrounding the valley (Dhading, Nuwakot and Kabhre), where their percentage in total population exceeds 18. On the other hand, only Tehrathum in far eastern hills the percentage is as high.

In western hills, there is heavy concentration of Brahmins in Gandaki Basin with five districts (Argha Khanchi, Parbat, Gulmi, Syangja and Kaski) having more than 30% of total population as Brahmin. There are three other districts (Gorkha, Baglung and Palpa) where the percentage exceeds 20. Contrary to the popular belief that percentage of Brahmins is more in the west than in the east, it is very small in the hilly areas of Rapti Zone where it ranges from 1.7 to 12.7 in Rolpa and Piuthan respectively. In Karnali Basin, the highest percentage is 17.8 in Kalikot. In other districts with the exception of Dailekh, it is less than 6. The percentage is more than 10 in all the hilly districts of the far west except in Bajura (7.5). The highest percentage is recorded in Baitadi and Dandeldhura. It is one of the paradoxes that percentage of Brahmins in total population in Gandaki Basin is higher than in the Karnali Basin.

In eastern Terai, the highest percentage was recorded in Jhapa (25) and in Chitwan (29) which is due to large migration since the 1960's. In the entire Mithila region, the percentage is very small as it ranges from 1 to 4 except in the case of Sarlahi. This is due to the fact that this region was densely populated before the beginning of large scale migration from the hills. Hill Brahmins make more than 10% of population of all western Terai districts except Banke (4.8) and Kapilbastu . The percentage is higher in far western Terai which could also be explained by recent migration from the hills.

The Terai Brahmins are found mainly in the Maithili speaking areas of the Terai between Bagmati and Kosi Rivers and in the Awadhi speaking Terai area of Lumbini Zone (mainly Rupandehi and Kapilvastu districts). The largest concentration of Maithili Brahmins was found in Mahottari District where they numbered 33,800 and formed 7.7 percent of the population of the district- the highest in Nepal. There is a small number of Bhojpuri speaking Terai Brahmins living in Terai area of Narayani Zone.The number of Terai Brahmins living west of Kapilvastu District in Dang Deokhuri, Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur Districts is very small as it is less than 5000. This is perhaps because of the fact

that these areas were covered by large forests and were inhabited mainly by indegenious *Tharus* before large scale migration from the hills started in the sixties.

There are Newari speaking *Rajopadhyay* Brahmins living in three cities of Kathmandu valley i.e. Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur who form the priestly class for high caste Hindu Newars. They are reported to number about 1500.[10]

POSTAGE STAMPS SHOWING SOME BRAHMINS OF NEPAL

NEPAL

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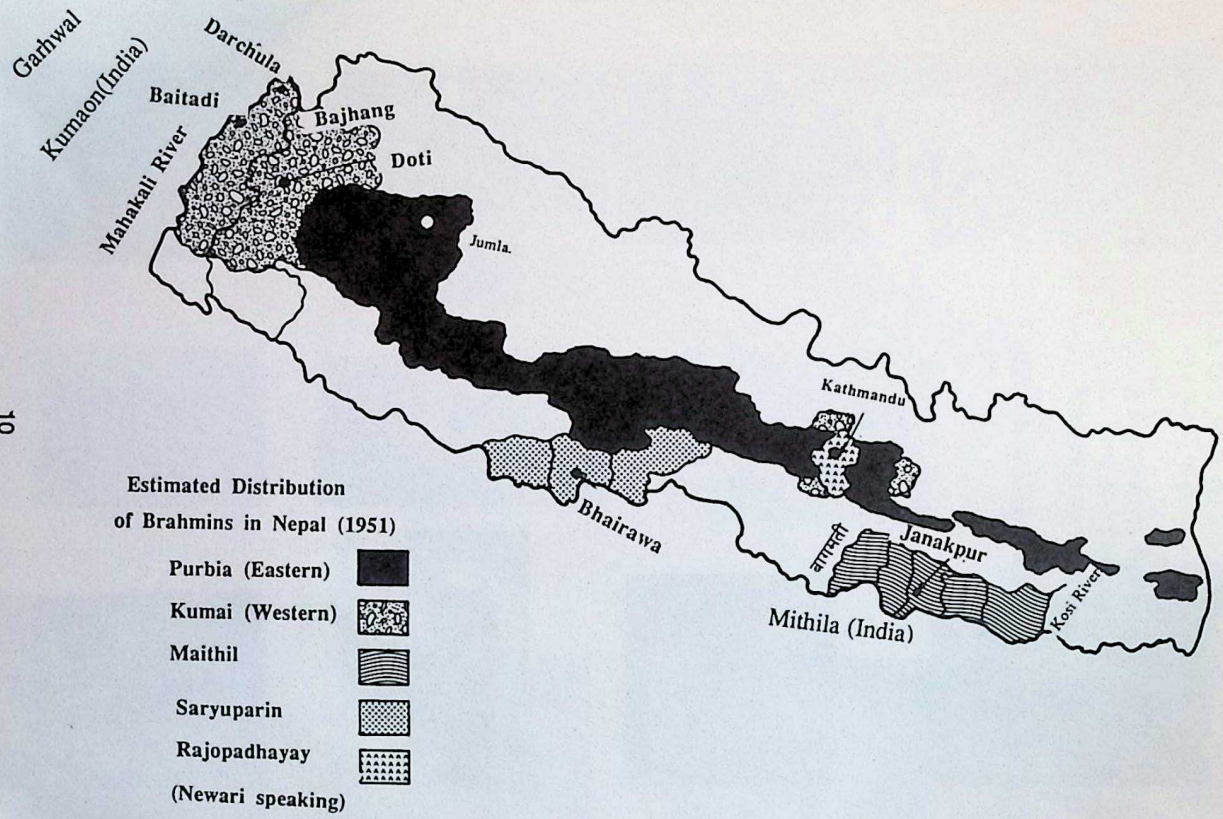
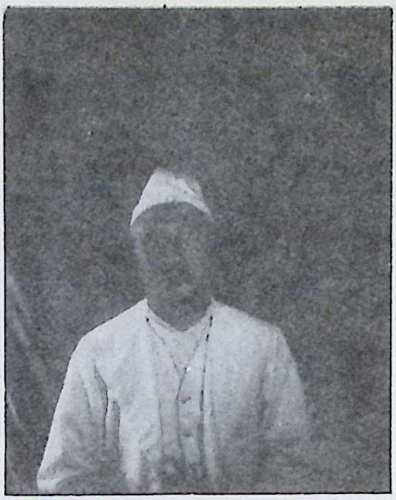

Garhwal
Kumaon(India)
Darchula
Baitadi
Bajhang
Doti
Mahakali River
Jumla
Kathmandu
Bhairawa
Janakpur
Mithila (India)
Kosi River
Estimated Distribution
of Brahmins in Nepal (1951)
Purbia (Eastern)
Kumai (Western)
Maithil
Saryuparin
Rajopadhayay
(Newari speaking)

Note:

The map showing the distribution of different kinds of Brahmins in Nepal was based on the Census of 1991 when questions relating to caste were asked for the first time. The map itself is supposed to represent the situation as it existed in the beginning of 1951 before the large scale migration from the hills to the Terai started. Maps showing the distribution of different ethnic groups in Nepal were prepared by Toni Hagen and Harka Gurung in the past. As no statistical records are available to differentiate different groups of hill Brahmins (Purbia, Kumai and Jaisi), certain assumptions have been used in this preparation. According to Purna Prakash Nepal Yatri who has travelled much in the western hills of Nepal, it is Seti Zone which forms the dividing line between the two kinds of hill Brahmins. However, there are many Kumai Brahmins who have migrated in the central and eastern part of the hills and there is no way to indicate it in the map as no statistical data are available. Similarly, there are no data which would indicate the location of Upadhayay (Purbia and Kumai) and Jaisi Brahmins (Purbia and Kumai). On the other hand, there are statistical data on Terai Brahmins. It is assumed that Terai Brahmins living in Mithila region of eastern Terai are Maithil and those living in Lumbini Terai are Sarayuparin Brahmin. Many areas of the Terai do not show any Brahmin population. There were few hill Brahmins or Terai Brahmins living in some parts of the Terai in 1951. However, the map shows the location of Rajopadhayay Brahmins who are Newari speaking in Kathmandu valley. The number of such Brahmins probably does not exceed 1500 and there were probably more Nepali speaking hill Brahmins in the valley even in 1951. Therefore, this map only tries to indicate the area where these Brahmins were living. As there is no district in Nepal where the Brahmins are in a majority, the map showing the distribution of Brahmins does not indicate that they are in majority. It merely indicates that they are living in the area.

A Brahmin living in western part of Pokhara Valley



A Brahmin teacher in a Sanskrit School in Kathmandu in 1930's

Three Sisters on their way to their brothers home during Tihar Festival

ORIGIN OF BRAHMINS IN NEPAL

There appears to be general agreement in historical records and family geneology that Hill Brahmins (both Purbia and Kumai) migrated from the Gangetic Plains to the western Himalayas then from there to the eastern Himalayas including Nepal. Gyawali [11] and Sharma [12] have claimed that Hill Brahmins entered the Himalayan region from Kannauj and were divided into eastern (Purbia) and western (Kumai). Both have claimed that Mahakali River was the dividing line between the two groups. However, Nepal [13] who had travelled extensively in Seti and Mahakali zones found that the dividing line was further east in Seti Zone and the custom of calling Brahmins living east of the line as *Sinjali* or *Purbia* by the Brahmins living in the west who are called *Kumai or Kurmanchali* by these Brahmins started from Seti Zone. Actually, almost all of the Brahmins living in Mahakali Zone and Doti and Bajhang Districts of Seti Zone belong to *Kumai* variety. The geneological records of several Hill Brahmins have been published recently which includes those of *Arjel, Lamichhane, Kharel, Gyawali* and *Nepal*. These provide insight into their origins. It is recorded in many of these geneologies that migration took place from Kannauj area in Uttar Pradesh in India. These Brahmins claim to be one of five categories of Brahmins known as *Panchagauda* living in northern India. *Maithil* are also suposed to be another group inside the same *Panchagauda* variety. Devkota [14] says five oldest groups of Brahmins in Jumla are *Neupane, Timsina, Chaulagain, Devkota* and *Dhital* who migrated from Kumaon-Garhwal area of the western Himalayas. According to him *Neupanes* are the most numerous among Brahmins there and *Acharyas* were relatively recent arrivals. Uday Bhatta, the ancestor of *Aryals* migrated from Srinagar in Garhwal to central Nepal in the year 1075 [15].

According to some writers [16] Brahmins could also have migrated directly north from different parts of India. There are *Marhattas* and *Wagleys* who have similar surnames as those in the state of Maharashtra in India. According to *Jatibhaskar* [17], one group of *Pandeys (Gautam gotra)* migrated from Kangra in Himanchal Pradesh to Kumaon before migrating to Nepal. In a family geneology presented Raj [18] has written that *Pandeys (Kashyap gotra)* had migrated from Kannauj to the village of Barakhola near Bhimtal in Kumaon region of India and had moved to such *Chaubisi* principalities as Tanahu and Palpa in seventeenth century. Gaurishwar from this family became the royal preceptor of King Narabhupal Shah of Gorkha , father of Prithvi Narayan Shah and also provided royal preceptors from 1902 to 1975. There were many Brahmins (both *Purbia* and *Kumai*) living in the area of Gorkha as early as fifteenth century is illustrated by the presence of Ganesh Pandey and Narayan Aryal who helped set up a kingdom for Drabya Shah who was the ancestor of Shah dynasty in Nepal.

HILL BRAHMINS AND TERAI BRAHMINS

During the advent of democracy in Nepal in 1950, there were Hill Brahmins in the hilly region of Nepal who were prohibited from eating certain kind of food such as onion, garlic and chicken. They were also strictly forbidden to drink alcoholic drinks although there was no such restriction in smoking of hashish and marijuana. After performance of *Bratabandha* ceremony, they were supposed to eat cooked rice when dressed in *dhoti*. They were supposed to eat rice cooked by only their group of Brahmins. In other words, a *Purbia* Brahmin would not eat rice cooked by a *Kumai* Brahmin and vice versa. Both would not eat rice cooked by a *Jaisi* Brahmin or by anyone considered to be lower caste. There was no intermarriage between these groups of Brahmins. In Kathmandu valley there were *Rajopadhyay* Brahmins and few *Maithil* Brahmins who ate rice cooked by their own group and did not marry with each other's groups.

There was considerable amount of forest land in the Terai and the indigenous *Tharus* lived on the foothills of the Siwalik Hills but many hillmen had been granted land by the government and they were cultivating such land by bringing labourers from India. However, in eastern Terai between Bagmati and Kosi Rivers was the Mithila region where there had been settlement of Maithili speaking people which also included a small number of Brahmins. Similarly, in the Lumbini Terai, there were Awadhi speaking people which also included Brahmins. There were few hill Brahmins settled in the Terai. Hill Brahmins did not intermarry with or eat rice cooked by Terai Brahmins and vice versa. Many of the Terai Brahmins married across the border in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. There is supposed to be a register in Darbhanga in Bihar where a record of generations of *Maithil* Brahmins is maintained which is normally checked before marriage in such Brahmins is finalized.

In any arranged marriage in a Brahmin family, care is taken to ensure that there is no marriage formalized between persons who belong to the same *gotra*. A large dowry is normally given to the daughter during the marriage among Terai Brahmins. The amount given is normally less in the case of Hill Brahmins.

It all changed in the sixties, seventies and eighties when a large number of people from the hills migrated to the Terai where malaria had been eradicated. This led to a large number of illegal settlements on forest land which were later regularized. By 1964, a new legal code was enacted which did not prohibit intermarriage between persons belonging to different castes. There were no longer restrictions on eating onion or garlic or chicken and drinking alcohol.

BRAHMINS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Much has been written about the fact that the Brahmins being at the top of caste hierarchy and relatively educated class would normally have opposed any change in status quo. It is in this context that social scientists as Dor Bahadur Bista[19] writes.

The fugitive Brahmins fleeing from the southern Plains from Islamic Jehad during the medieval period took shelter in the western hills which was the Khas country until then. The only way of survival for the Brahmins was to act as priests or preachers.

Similarly, Malla [5] has blamed Brahmins for creating distinction between the high and the low and the pure and impure for the last 2000 years in Nepal. On the other hand, he disagrees that Brahmins are fatalistic and says

If any section of society has perfectly internalized the Protestant capitalistic work ethic" and its accompanying cult of acquisitive success, it is the Brahmins.

He continues to say : *Without relentlessly pursuing success now could they have dominated every field of Nepali public life just in a matter of a few generations since Nepali nation state ?. You name it-rightists, centrist or leftist politics, the media, literature, diplomacy, civil service- you will invariably find Brahmins at the top, if not dangerously close to it.*

He concludes that their fatalism did not carry them to the top. I wonder if a similar line of argument was used by Nazis against the Jews before Hitler came to power in the dark days of the 1930's. The percentage of Hill Brahmins in Nepal is about 13 which is much higher than that of Jews in Germany before the Second World War or that of Brahmins in the Indian state of Tamilnadu before the heyday of the Dravidian parties (DMK and AIDMK). This is one way of looking at the problem. On the other hand, many of the Nepalese who fought to bring democracy in Nepal such as Koirala brothers, Tanka Prasad Acharya, D.R.Regmi were all hill Brahmins. It is true that Brahmins in the pre-1950 days could not be given capital punishment because of their caste. Three out of four *martyrs* of anti Rana movement of 1940 were Newars. Had the practice of not executing Brahmins not been prevalent in those days, there would have been many Brahmin martyrs as well. Similarly, such leaders in post-restoration of democracy era (1990) in Nepal as K.P.Bhattarai, G.P.Koirala, Govinda Raj Joshi, Chiranjivi Wagle, Dhundi Raj Shastri, Shailaja Acharya, Ram Chandra Paudel and Daman Dhungana in Nepali Congress and Man Mohan Adhikari, Madan Bhandari, K.P.Sharma Oli, Madhav Nepal, Pradeep Nepal, and Bam Dev Gautam in Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) have all been hill Brahmins. What is important to note in this context is the fact that Brahmins acted as agents of social change. While they

were playing an important role in bringing democracy in 1951 and in restoration of democracy in 1990, they were fighting for an egalitarian society in which the predominant position of Brahmin if there was any, could not be preserved. This is because of the fact that a vast majority of Brahmins were illiterate and poor and had little stake in preserving a system which they believed had kept most of them illiterate and backward. Although there were Sanskrit schools in the country in pre-1950 period, there were possibility of getting admitted for only a few hundred Brahmin students and receiving free education. A vast majority of the Brahmins had therefore, remained untouched by any schools run by the government. It is true, they had tried to avail themselves of education as belonging to the "highest caste" which was not taken for mercenary duty outside the country or had any expertise in business as some other communities in the country. Few Brahmins who had the opportunity of sending their children to state run Sanskrit schools chose to send their own children to such schools in later years.

Such persons as Malla and Bista who talk about "alien influence for 2000 years" fail to understand historical facts and attempt to oversimplify a complex question. What about the **Khas Brahmins** in the western Himalayas who are as indigenous as others. Books like *Jatibhaskar* talk about **Khas Brahmins** being present as far west as Garhwal in the western Himalayas. Talking about **Khas Chhetris** in western part of Nepal, Bista[19] states such clan names as Adhikari, Bhandari and Bista which are similar to those of Brahmins and he talks about alien influence from the Gangetic Plains and Sanskrit at the same time.

If the pre-1950 legal code forbade Brahmins to eat garlic, onion or chicken or to drink alcohol, few Brahmins in the urban areas observe such restrictions at the present time. Fewer observe caste restrictions.Even in rural areas where such restrictions were observed more rigidly in the past there is a new flexibility in observing these. This is inspite of the fact that there are occasional reports in the newspapers about high caste people refusing to accept milk collected by *Dalits* or untouchables. It is also interesting to note that many of the Brahmin communist leaders of present day Nepal have non-Brahmin wives.

Many Brahmin women have also played a pioneering role in political and social life of the country which promoted social change. These women have included ministers in Nepali Congress government, principals of institutions of higher education and government officials. In this context Julia Thompson [21] found that public display of resistance among high caste women which would presumably include Brahmins was less prevalent before 1990. She discovered that they were beginning to question and challenge interpersonal relations between men and women.

Sharma[20] has written that most of anthropological work in Nepal is done by Westerners who are describing Brahmins as a "class of exploiters". He believes *Janjati* parties are attempting to give racial and "outsider" vs "insider" twist to their policies.

RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH BRAHMINS

Brahmins in Nepal follow many rituals during such occasions as birth, marriage and death. There are also many rituals which are followed during festivals which are celebrated.

BIRTH

The most important ritual followed by Brahmins after the birth of a child is called *Nwaran* or name giving ceremony eleven days after birth. It is also supposed to be a ceremony in which the father recognizes the paternity of the child. The name given to the child is usually different than the name by which he/she is called. Almost every child thus has two names.

FEEDING OR PASNE CEREMONY

This ceremony takes place five to six months after the birth of the child and is also called *Annaprashan* which means a ceremony in which foodgrain, usually rice is fed to the child which has been taking only milk.

BRATABANDHA OR UPANAAYAN

This is supposed to be one of the most important ceremony for a Brahmin male. Actually, a Brahmin becomes "twice born after this ceremony. In the beginning of twentieth century, it was common practice for young Brahmin boys to undergo this ceremony at an age of five to seven. However, increasing number of Brahmin boys now undergo this ceremony in their early teens. As a part of ritual, the head of the boy is shaved except of his *shikha*. Then he goes for a *Bhiksha,* which is begging for alms from his relatives and others who are present in the ceremony. The boy is also given the sacred *gayatri mantra* by his father or some elderly relative. The *mantra* is in honour of Sun God and asks for giving wisdom. Brahmins are supposed to chant this throughout their lives. The boy is also supposed to get dressed in a white *dhoti* while eating rice. It was customary to eat rice only while dressed in a *dhoti* till the 1950's for all Hill Brahmins. However, few observe this restriction except in remote villages.

MARRIAGE CEREMONY

It was common in pre-1950 days for Brahmin girls to get married at an early age before they had their monthly period. Almost all of marriages were arranged by parents. However, recent change in legislation has fixed the minimum age of marriage to be 21 in the case of boys and 18 in the case of girls. The rituals practiced in traditional marriage ceremony which lasts for at least two days are quite complex. The custom of giving dowry to the girl among Hill Brahmins is not as expensive as among Terai Brahmins or those in the plains of India. Cross cousin marriages are not accepted among Brahmins as they are customary among certain ethnic groups in Nepal.

Marriage ceremony takes place in certain times of the year, in the Nepalese months of Baisakh (April-May), Jeth (May-June), Mangsir (November-December), Magh (January-February) and Fagun (February-March). The bride is supposed to be dressed in red for the ceremony and not white as in the west. The groom goes to the house of the bride accompanied by a procession which is called *janti* or *baraat* (in Terai). The main ceremony is performed in a specially constructed platform called *Jagya*. The marriage ceremony is witnessed by fire. After the conclusion of the ceremony, the groom takes the bride to his home.

FUNERAL RITES

After death the body is taken for cremation to specific sites along river banks. The most common cremation site in Kathmandu is along the Bagmati River near the temple of Pashupatinath. The eldest son usually starts the fire which is called *giving dagbatti*. Women are not supposed to go near the cremation site. The sons are supposed to perform *kriya* for thirteen days wearing white and following many other restrictions. Actually, it was customary to observe the period of mourning for one entire year by wearing only white. On the other hand, Brahmin widows were supposed to wear white all their lives.

Brahmins also perform *Shraddha* ceremony in honour of their dead parents and ancestors every year. They also go to such pilgrimage sites as Muktinath and Manokamana in Nepal, Manasarovar in Tibet and many sites in India. The most famous pilgrimage sites in India include *char dhaam* which means four main sites in four corners of India, i.e. Badrinath in the north, Jagannath in Puri in the east, Dwaraka in the west and Rameshwaram in the south. The important pilgrimage site also includes the holy city of Varanasi where it is considered especially auspicious to spend the last days. Many Nepalese Brahmins went for *Kashibaas* which meant living in the holy city in the last days. The city of Varanasi was also famous also as a centre of learning Sanskrit. There were many Nepalese Brahmins going there for Sanskrit studies.

FESTIVALS CELEBRATED

Brahmins celebrate such Hindu festivals as Dashain and Tihar. On the other hand, there are certain festivals which they are supposed to celebrate with special vigour. This includes the festival of **Janai Purnima** on the full moon day in the month of Sravan (August) when they are supposed to change the sacred thread. Non Brahmins Hindus are tied *Raxa* on their wrists. Actually, *Janai Purnima* or *Raxa Bandhan* is supposed to be the most important festival for the Brahmins as *Dashain* is for Kshetriyas, *Laxmi Puja* or *Tihar* for Vaishyas and *Holi (Fagu)* for Shudras. A festival which is celebrated by Brahmin women is *Teej* which will be described in detail in the following lines. Not all Hindu women celebrate this festival.

Kuse Aunsi-It is closest equivalent to "Fathers Day" in Nepal and children bring gifts to their fathers in Kathmandu homes. Thousands of devout Hindus gather in the banks of the river Bagmati at Gokarna to pay respects to their dead fathers. The site should be visited early in the morning.

Teej- This is a special festival for married women who are supposed to fast all day and bathe in the holy waters of the rivers. The entrance to Pashupati Temple is a good place to watch as crowds of women come down to the river, dressed in brightly coloured saris with red marks on their foreheads. It is believed that their married life will be long and happy and they will not lose their husbands if they celebrate this festival. Red is a symbol of joy and happiness in Nepal and the colour used for marriage ceremonies. Married women are supposed to wear a lot of red but widows are forbidden to do so; white is the colour of mourning in Nepal.

Bada Dasain- This is the biggest festival in Nepal and lasts fifteen days in all, although the main festivities are concentrated in nine days during which all government offices and schools are closed. Almost all of Brahmins in Nepal, the Hill Brahmins and Maithil Brahmins living in the Terai are worshippers of Kali and eat meat. There is animal sacrifice as part of Dashain ritual in many homes. The eighth day called *Asthami* is special for worship of Kali in Brahmin homes. The tenth day *Bijaya Dashami* is the highlight of the festival and all Hindus and many Buddhists go to their relatives and elders in order to receive a *tika* which is rice immersed in a red liquid and placed on their forehead. On the streets of Kathmandu on this day you will hardly see a person who does not wear this red mark. This represents the victory of good over evil, as according to legend it commemorates the killing of a demon by the goddess Durga.

The final day of the festival, which coincides with the full moon, is marked by much gambling in some Nepalese households. Dasain is not only the biggest festival but a happy one because the weather is perfect and rice is almost ready to be harvested.

Tihar - The third and the fifth days are the most important of this five day festival. In western India (including Delhi), it is the biggest Hindu festival and in Nepal second only to Dasain. On the first day, crows, the messengers of death are honoured and fed. The second day is in honour of the dogs, the vehicle of Bhairab. The third day is set aside for cows as the incarnation of Laxmi, the goddess of wealth. The day is called Deepawali (Diwali) , the festival of lights, and all the households of Kathmandu are illuminated by lamps to the goddess of wealth. This festival always falls on a New Moon so the effect is particularly delightful. It is said that the goddess Laxmi will shun any household not illuminated on this day, which is also an occasion for gambling.

The fifth day of the festival is *Bhai Tika* and is meant especially for brothers and sisters who are supposed to get together on this day.

DISTRICTS WHERE THE PERCENTAGE OF BRAHMINS IN THE TOTAL POPULATION IS MORE THAN 18.(1991 CENSUS)

CONTRIBUTION AND ROLE IN THE NATIONAL INTEGRATION OF NEPAL

Brahmins in Nepal have lived longer than the descendants of Mayflower have lived in the United States. There were perhaps Brahmins living in the Kathmandu valley during Lichhavi period in the fifth century when the oldest stone inscription was written in Changu Narayan in Sanskrit language. It is possible that there were Brahmins living in Kapilvastu and Lumbini during the time of Gautam Buddha. There were Brahmins living in ancient Mithila including Janakpur in Nepal where there were Maithil Brahmins living for a long time. There were Khas Brahmins living in Karnali Basin for thousands of years. Therefore, the allegations by such writers as Dor Bahadur Bista, Kamal Prakash Malla and some *Janjati* leaders that Brahmins entered Nepal only as refugees from Muslim *Jehad* is not true. Of course, ancestors of most Brahmins of today did enter Nepal because of religious disturbance in the Gangetic Plains but not all of them. It is actually in this context that attempts are being made to differentiate indigenous people from "immigrants" who came three to six centuries earlier. There are sweeping generalizations such as the Brahmins having brought Hindu religion and caste system in Nepal are the cause of its backwardness which seems to be the central theme of the book entitled **Fatalism and Development.** Such arguments are being used to create ethnic divide in Nepal by some vested interests. It is the opinion of this writer that Brahmins may actually have played an important role in national integration of Nepal. This is inspite of the fact that there were existing in Nepal such evils affecting Hindu society such as caste system and untouchability. The doors of education which was mainly Sanskrit till the beginning of twentieth century was closed to all except a few Brahmins. However, not all Brahmins were literate or had an opportunity to go to school. Perhaps less than one percent of the Brahmins had such an opportunity. There is a large proportion of Jaisis among the Brahmin population which did not act as priests. Bista[19] has described them as peasant farmers. Actually, Upadhayay Brahmins were prohibited from cultivating land using a *halo*. Any Upadhayay Brahmin who did that "lost" his caste and became **Jaisi.** This was ironic in view of the fact that such taboos existed in a predominantly agricultural country. The following lines attempt to elaborate on this theme.

LINGUISTIC ASPECT

The most important contribution of hill Brahmins in Nepal is in enriching the Nepali language which is the national as well as the link language in the country. Although there were (and still are) many illiterate Brahmins, their literacy was better than average in a country where percentage of literacy was perhaps less than one percent in the beginning of twentieth century. Many

Brahmins studied Sanskrit either in free government schools or in private schools with their *Gurus*. Many of them also wrote in Nepali at a time when its literature was not well developed. There are more hill Brahmin writers, novelists, poets and critics in Nepali language than any other ethnic group. This is in spite of the fact that Nepali is the mother tongue of over half of Nepal's population and Brahmins make only about a quarter of Nepali mother tongue population (their percentage in Nepal's population being about 13%). There are Chhetris, Thakuris, and occupational castes whose mother tongue is Nepali besides many *janatis*. In fact, the mother tongue of two thirds of Magars and one half of Gurungs and a third of Newars is now Nepali. Many ethnic groups have adopted Nepali as their mother tongue as Nepali speaking groups moved from west to east in the hilly region of Nepal during the process of unification. When there were few schools at that time teaching in Nepali language, the development of a *lingua franca* was absolutely necessary for emergence of Nepal as a separate entity. The writing of devotional literature by such Brahmin poets as Bhanubhakta Acharya played an important role in popularizing Nepali language at a crucial period in history. Nepal had a Nepali speaking population stretching from Ilam in the east to Dandeldhura in the west. If a Limbu from Panchthar wanted to talk to a Gurung from Kaski or a Newar from Bhaktapur he could do so in Nepali and not in his native language Limbu, Gurung or Newari which would not be understood by others. Many writers whose mother tongue was not Nepali made significant contribution in the development of Nepali. These included Subba Riddhi Bahadur Malla, Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan, Bhupi Sherchan and Bhawani Bhikshu. It was not easy for the Brahmins to write in Nepali and not in Sanskrit. When the first standardized grammar of Nepali *Chandrika* was written by Hemraj Sharma from the family of royal preceptors of Nepal, some Sanskrit scholars were not amused as he had written in Nepali and not in Sanskrit.

As Nepali was an Indo-European language closely related to Hindi which is understood in the Terai, there was not much opposition there as both were written in Devanagari script and had many Sanskrit words. If a Tibeto-Burmese language had been made the national language and imposed on the Terai, the Madhise population would never have accepted it. A great injustice was done to the non-Brahmins when Sanskrit schools were not open to them. Such non-Brahmin Sanskrit scholars as Swami Prapannacharya had to study Sanskrit in the Indian universities. Such discriminatory practice is now illegal but there are still few non-Brahmins who are students at Mahendra Sanskrit University in Nepal. This has led to a feeling of alienation among the non-Brahmins many of whom have become opposed to introduction of compulsory Sanskrit in Nepali schools. In a nutshell, the contribution of Brahmins in development of Nepali language which helped in national integration must be admitted.

SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECT

Hinduism as practiced in Nepal was less orthodox than that practiced in the Indian plains. Studying the Hindus of the Himalayas, Barreman[31] discussing orthodoxy in the area states

Hindu unorthodoxy in this area is due in part due to cultural heritage of the Paharis and in part due to their isolation from areas where modern Hinduism developed. They have little time or money for elaborate Hindu rituals of the plains.

Actually such practices as dowry are not prevalent to the same extent in the Nepalese hills among Brahmins and other communities as in the Indian plains. A new sub-caste was developed after marriage between Brahmin men and Chhetri/Thakuri or tribal women as well as between Chhetri men and tribal women which helped increase the number of Chhetris in the population and gave upward mobility to many groups. Although caste system had legal sanction till 1964, it was abolished by King Mahendra the only Hindu King in the world and there was almost no opposition from either Brahmins or others for this step.

POLITICAL ASPECT

Brahmins played a major role in bringing democracy in Nepal. Such political leaders as the Koirala brothers (Matrika, BP and Girija), Tanka Prasad Acharya, D.R.Regmi and Surya Prasad Upadhayay were all Brahmins. They helped bring the political changes in the year 1951 when democracy was brought to Nepal. B.P.Koirala elected the leader of majority party after the first general elections in 1958, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai appointed Prime Minister in 1990 after restoration of democracy and above all, the first prime minister elected by the majority party following general elections after the adoption of new constitution when sovereignty had been transferred to the people, were all Brahmins. Brahmins in Nepal have fought to bring an egalitarian society where access to education would be open to all and where all section of the society would be empowered with adult franchise. They fought for a system where all irrespective of caste, creed or ethnicity would be able to participate in the governance.

Although there were many Brahmins who were affluent in some areas of the country, a vast majority was illiterate and poor. They supported the abolition of Rana regime in the country and BP Koirala who advocated socialism became Prime Minister in 1959. Many Brahmins became communists and fought for re-distribution of wealth which would presumably benefit the masses. There were few Brahmins in the country who were businessmen as they were not known for their entrepreneurship skills. Brahmins did not benefit from employment in the British and the Indian armies as mercenaries. Most of the beneficiaries of such service were from such *janajati* or tribal groups as Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu.

It is in the context of the above facts that the claims by such writers as

Dor Bahadur Bista that an alien culture brought by Brahmins has been pervasive which excludes groups with positive elements of value system in their social and practices needs to be examined. According to this theory, the culture of fatalism devalues the concept of productivity. Bista says that caste system was introduced by Brahmins arriving in Kathmandu valley and in the Karnali Basin during the medieval period. On the other hand, even Bista admits that Nepal was never plagued by religious fanaticism. How was this possible when this "alien" Hindu influence which he says was brought by Brahmins ?. Could Bista believe that other ethnic groups in the country are not affected by fatalism even before they came in contact with the Brahmins ?. A group which has helped bring democracy in the country leading to empowerment of all the ethnic groups in the country and which has played a role in national integration for having popularized Nepali language, encouraged the upward mobility of many groups in the caste system and has also acted as an agent of social change be accused of being fatalistic ?.

A map is presented in this book which marks the districts where the percentage of Brahmins in the population exceeds 50% of the total population percentage in the country as a whole. In other words, districts where more than 19% of the population is Brahmin which includes Chitwan, Jhapa, Kaski, Argha Khanchi, Gulmi, Kathmandu, Kabhre, Tehrathum and Syangja. These are among the most developed districts in Nepal. If fatalism had played the major role in backwardness, if it had existed at all then these districts would not be as developed as they are today.

POPULATION OF NEPAL BY ETHNICITY (1991)+

Chhetri*	16%	Thakuri*	1.6%
Brahmin (hill)*	13%	Limbu*	1.6%
Magar*	7.2%	Sarki*+	1.5%
Tharu**	6.4%	Teli**	1.3%
Newar*	5.6%	Kuswaha**	1.1%
Tamang*	5.5%	Chamar**	1.1%
Kami*+	5.2%	Sanyasi*	1.0%
Yadav/Ahir**	4.1%	Kurmi**	0.9%
Rai*	2.8%	Brahmin**	.9%
Gurung*	2.4%	Kalwar**	0.9%
Damai*+	2.9%	Sherpa*	0.6%

* Hill groups **Terai groups +Depressed class

+ Based on Census of Nepal, 1991

HILL BRAHMIN SURNAMES AND GOTRAS

All the Brahmins in Nepal are supposed to have a *gotra* which signifies the name of an ancient *Rishi* or sage. A person having a particular *gotra* is supposed to be descended from the sage having that name. In other words, a person having *Bharadwaj gotra* is supposed to be descended from Rishi Bharadwaj. The marriage between persons belonging to the same *gotra* is also prohibited. It may be possible for persons having a certain surname to belong to different *Gotras*. For example, a Brahmin having a surname **Pant** can belong either to *Bharadwaj or Parashar gotra*. However, most surnames indicate only one *gotra*. The following list is based on information given in *Thar Gotra Prabarawali* and *Jatibhaskar*.

The letter P and K indicates two major groups of Hill Brahmins in Nepal, i.e. *Purbia* (eastern) found mainly east of Karnali River and *Kumai* (western) living west of Karnali River who have also migrated to the eastern hills. Both contain *Upadhyay* and *Jaisi* varieties.

Surname		**Gotra**
Acharya	(P)	Kaudinya, Garga
Adhikari	(P)	Kashyap, Bharadwaj, Atreya, Mandabya
Aryal	(P)	Atreya
Banskota	(P)	Kaudinya
Bastola	(P)	Garga
Badal	(P)	Kashyap
Baral	(P)	Kaushik
Basti	(P)	Atreya
Bhandari	(P) (K)	Bharadwaj, Bashista
Bhatta	(K)	Kashyap, Bishwamitra, Upamanyu, Garga
Bhattarai	(P)	Bashista
Bhurtel	(P)	Garg
Bhetwal	(K)	Garg
Bista	(K)	.....
Belbase	(P)	.....
Chalise	(P)	Bashista
Chapagain	(P)	Atreya
Chataut	(K)	.....
Chaulagain	(K)	Bharadwaj
Dahal	(P)	Batsa
Devkota	(P)	.....
Duwadi	(P)	Atreya
Dhakal	(P)	Upamanyu

Dhital	(P)	Kaushik, Gautam
Dhungana	(P)	Kaushik
Dhungel	(P)	Agatsya
Gajurel	(P)	Garga
Gautam	(P)	Artreya
Ghimire	(P)	Kashyap
Guragain	(P)	Dhananjaya
Gyawali	(P)	Mandabya
Joshi	(K) (P)	Kaushik, Angiras, Bharadwaj, Garg
Kadel	(K)	Bharadwaj
Khanal	(P)	Kaushik
Khakurel	(K)	.....
Kharel	(K)	Bashista
Koirala	(P)	Maudgalya
Khatiwada	(P)	Atreya
Kuinkel	(P)	Maudgalya
Lamsal	(P)	Batsa
Lamichhane	(P)	Kaushik, Garg
Lekhak	(K)	Bharadwaj
Lohani	(K)	Bharadwaj
Luintel	(P)	Kaushik
Mainali	(K)	Upamanyu
Marhatta	(P)	Parashar
Mishra	(K) (P)	Atreya
Mudbhari	(P)	Bashista
Nepal	(P)	Kaushik
Niraula	(P)	Bharadwaj
Ojha	(K)	Atreya
Oli	(K)	.....
Pandey	(K)	Kashyap, Gautam, Bharadwaj, Batsa, Parasar, Upamanyu
Paneru	(K)	Kaudinya
Pandit	(P)	Ghrit Kaushik
Pant	(K)	Bharadwaj
Panthi	(P)	Mandabya
Parajuli	(P)	Kaudinya
Pathak	(K)	Kaushik, Bashista
Paudel	(P)	Atreya
Pokhrel	(P)	Atreya, Bharadwaj
Prsai	(K)	Shandilya
Pudasaini	(P)	Kaushik
Pyakurel	(P)	Kaudinya
Regmi	(P) (K)	Kaushik
Rijal	(P)	Dhananjay
Rimal	(P)	Kaaushik

Risal	(P)	Garg
Rupakheti	(P)	Batsa
Sapkota	(P)	Kaudinya
Sangraula	(P)	.....
Satyal	(P)	Kaudinya
Sedhai	(K)	Angiras
Shukla		.....
Sigdel	(P)	Atreya
Silwal	(K)	Bharadwaj
Sinkhada	(P)	Mandabya
Siwakoti	(K)	Bharadwaj
Soti	(P)	.....
Subedi	(P)	Bharadwaj
Thapalia	(K)	Bharadwaj
Timilsina	(P)	Mandabya
Tiwari	(K) (P)	Kaushik
Tripathi	(K)	.....
Upreti	(K)	Maudgalya
Wagle	(P)	Bharadwaj

TERAI BRAHMIN SURNAMES AND GOTRAS

Surname	Gotra
Chaturvedi	.....
Chaudhari	.....
Jha	Kashyap
Mishra	
Pandey	
Tripathi	
Thakur	

DISTRICTWISE CENSUS OF BRAHMINS

1991

	Total	Hill Brahmins	%	Terai Brahmins	%
Nepal	16.490.000	2,388,000	13	162,886	1
Eastern Hills					
Taplejung	120,000	15,900	13.2		
Panchthar	175,200	25,000	14.0		
Ilam	229,200	36,600	15.5		
Dhankuta	146,300	10,500	7.1		
Tehrathum	102,800	18,600	18.9		
Sankhuwa	142,000	10,900	7.6		
Bhojpur	198,800	18,900	9.5		
Solokhumbu	97,200	5,800	6.0		
Okhaldhunga	139,400	19,100	13.7		
Khotang	216.000	21,700	10		
Udaypur	221,200	16,200	7.3		
Sindhuli	223.900	24,200	10.8		
Ramechhap	188,000	12,700	6.8		
Dolakha	173,200	19.800	11.4		
Sindhu	261,000	30.900	11.8		
Kabhre	324,300	76,300	23.5		
Lalitpur	257,000	28,500	11.1		
Bhaktapur	173,000	15,200	8.8		
Kathmandu	675,300	130,700	19.4	1,073	
Nuwakot	245,300	53,200	21.7		
Rasuwa	36,700	6,200	16.9		
Dhading	278,000	51,900	18.3		
Makwanpur	314,500	45,200	14.3		
Eastern Terai					
Jhapa	593,700	149,900	25.0	2,480	04
Morang	674,800	93,800	14.0	6,800	1.5
Sunsari	463,500	39,200	8.4	4,200	1.1
Saptari	465,700	6,300	1.3	16,300	3.4
Siraha	461,000	5,400	1.1	4,000	1.3
Dhanusha	543,700	10,100	1.9	20,300	3.7
Mahottari	440,100	7,300	1.7	33,800	7.7
Sarlahi	492,800	21,440	4.4	13,300	2.7
Rautahat	414,500	12,300	3.0	13,000	3.1
Bara	415,800	21,900	5.3	5,000	2.3
Parsa	372,500	11,500	3.1	7,400	2
Chitwan	354,500	104,700	29.0	400	

Western Hills					
Gorkha	252,500	50,600	20.0		
Lamjung	153,700	24,900	16.0		
Tanahu	268,100	38,100	14.0		
Syangja	293,500	98,300	33.0		
Kaski	292,900	90,800	31.0	500	
Manang	5,400	266	5.0		
Mustang	14,300	510	3.5		
Myagdi	100,600	7,700	7.6		
Parbat	143,500	55,900	38.8		
Baglung	232,500	54,700	23.6		
Gulmi	266,300	81,000	30.4		
Palpa	236,300	47,900	20.2		
Arghakhan	180,900	70,300	39.0		
Pyuthan	175,500	22,300	12.7		
Rolpa	179,700	2,200	1.3		
Rukum	155,600	6,800	4.3		
Dailekh	187,400	23,500	12.5		
Dolpa	25,000	600	2.4		
Jumla	76,000	9,400	12.4		
Kalikot	98,000	17,500	17.8		
Mugu	36,000	2,000	5.5		
Humla	34,400	2,300	6.7		
Salyan	181,800	7,200	3.9		
Western Terai					
Nawalpara	436,200	70,000	16.0	2,200	.5
Rupandehi	522.100	64,800	12.4	9,250	1.7
Kapilbastu	371,800	26,000	7.0	11,000	3
Banke	285,600	13,650	4.8	3,300	1.2
Bardia	290,300	27,400	9.4	700	
Surkhet	225,800	25,900	11.4		
Dang	354,400	38,200	10.8	600	
Far Western Hills					
Bajura	92,000	6,900	7.5		
Bajhang	139,100	15,300	11.0		
Achham	198,000	22,700	11.5		
Doti	167,200	18,000	10.8		
Dadeldh.	104,600	20,000	19.1		
Baitadi	201,000	41,700	20.7		
Far Western Terai					
Kailali	417,900	40,000	9.6	500	
Kanchanpu	257,900	38,500	14.9	325	

ORIGIN OF HILL BRAHMIN SURNAMES AND DESCRIPTION

ACHARYA

This includes the well known *Acharya Dixits* (Kaudinya *gotra*) who were powerful during the later half of the Rana regime and are influential to this day. According to *Acharya Bamshavali* written in the beginning of this century in Sanskrit, they migrated from Kanyakubja to Jumla. There is a place called Acharyabada there. Their surname at that time was *Bhatta*. They acquired the name Acharya in Jumla. They migrated to a place called Mudhikhu near Kathmandu in the eighteenth century. They started writing *Dixit* after performing a *yagna* at Varanasi in 1899. Acharya Dixits such as Ram Mani, Madan Mani and Kamal Mani have been writers in Nepali language.

The famous poet Bhanubhakta Acharya from the village of Chundi Ramgha in Tanahu District was a famous poet who had been given the title of *Adi Kabi*. Babu Ram Acharya, a well known historian was given the title of *Itihas Shiromani* which means the *jewel of history*. Tanka Prasad Acharya had fought against the Rana regime to bring democracy in Nepal was Prime Minister in the 1950's.

ADHIKARI

The word Adhikari in Sanskrit means someone having authority and perhaps the name derived from the fact that ancestors of some Adhikaris had acted as government officials in some kingdoms. According to *Jatibhaskar* this surname derived from authority in scriptures. There are Adhikari Brahmins in Bengal and Orissa. There are also Adhikari Brahmins living in Kumaon who migrated there from Mewad in Rajasthan [23]. There are four *gotras* among Adhikaris in Nepal. Adhikari *(Kashyap gotra)* were the preceptors *(Dixa guru)* of some of the Rana rulers. Man Mohan Adhikari was Prime Minister of Nepal in 1994-95 and belonged to Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist).

ARYAL (ARJEL)

The name Aryal is supposed to have originated from Gulmi District. As Aryal, Sigdela and Paudel have the same *gotra*, they claim to have descended from a common ancestor. The ancestor of Aryals called Uday Bhatta came from Srinagar Garhwal in the eleventh century. Narayan Aryal along with Ganesh Pandey in mid sixteenth century helped Drabya Shah establish the kingdom of Gorkha which became Nepal after the campaign of unification by Prithvi Narayan Shah. Aryals became *Purohits* (royal priests) of Nepal in the early part of Shah rule till 1902.

BHANDARI

The name signifies *storekeeper* and it is possible that the name could be derived from having performed such duty in some of the *Baisi* or *Chaubisi* kingdoms.

BHATTA

It is at the present time, one of the most common surnames among Kumai Brahmins in Seti and Mahakali Zones. There are many different kinds of Bhattas having several *gotras*. When the ancestors of such Purbia Brahmins as Aryal and Acharya entered Nepal from India, their surname was supposed to have been Bhatta. It is actually a common surname among many different kinds of Brahmins in India. The *gotra* of the famous poet, biographer and critic Motiram Bhatta was *Bishwamitra*.

BHATTARAI

Bhattarais are mainly found in eastern part of Nepal, especially east of Gorkha. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai was the first Prime Minister of Nepal after restoration of democracy in 1990.
Several Bhattarais such as Rohini Prasad, Harsha Nath and Badari Nath have contributed in enriching Nepali language. On the other hand, there has been a great Sanskrit scholar Padma Prasad who specialized in *Darshan* and *Nabya Nyaya*.

BISTA

The number of Brahmins in Nepal having surname Bista is relatively small in Nepal. They are also found in Khoplang in Gorkha and Chiti in Lamjung Districts. Kirti Nidhi Bista was Prime Minister for several years during Panchayat period.

DHAKAL

The name Dhakal is derived from the village Dhaka in Doti District.

DEVKOTA

Devkotas migrated from Jumla to Gorkha and Kathmandu. Laxmi Prasad Devkota was a towering figure in Nepalese literary scene and a fomous poet was was awarded the title of *Mahakavi*.

DHITAL

The name Dhital is derived from a village called Dhita situated near Jumla. They are supposed to have migrated from Kanyakubja to Dhita. There are many Dhitals living in Grokha where they migrated from Jumla.

DHUNGEL

Most of Dhungels write their surname as Upadhayay. The well known politician Surya Prasad Upadhaya was a Dhungel.

GAUTAM

The surname Gautam is said to be derived from the village Gotam which is situated in Gautam in Dailekh District. The biggest landowner in Nepal during later half of the Rana Period was Harihar Gautam from Argha Khanchi District. Among great Sanskrit scholars were Kulachandra Gautam and Gangadhar Gautam.

GYAWALI

According to Bamshavali[22] Gyawalis migrated from Palpa to Jumla and later from there to Gewa in Gulmi District. There are many Gyawalis living in Palpa, and Gulmi Districts and who have recently migrated to such places in the Terai as Rupandehi, Kapilvastu and Bardia. Most of the Brahmins are supposed to have migrated from west to east and this represents an exception to the general trend. Surya Bikram Gyawali was a well known writer in Nepali language.

JOSHI

Joshi is a very common surname among the Brahmins. The name Joshi is probably derived from the fact that Brahmins having this surname were astrologers. There are many *gotras* among Brahmins having this surname. They are most numerous in Seti and Mahakali Zones among Kumai Brahmins although there are a few among Purbias as well. Joshi (Garg *gotra)* migrated from Kanyakubj to Kumaon [23] and Seti and Mahakali Zones in Nepal. On the other hand, Joshi (Upamanyu *gotra)* migrated from Prayag (near present day Allahabad) to Kumaon. Some Joshis having Kaushik gotra and Angiras gotra also write Regmi and Sedhai as their surnames.

KHAREL

The surname Kharel is supposed to be derived from the village of Khari near Jumla where Kharels had migrated from Kumaon[24]. There is a large settlement of Kharels at Kharelthok in Kabhre District.

LAMICHHANE

Many Lamichhanes don't write their surname but write Sharma or Upadhayay instead. According to *Banshawali,*[25] Lamichhanes are supposed to have migrated from Lamathada in Jumla to Gorkha, Nuwakot, Kabhre and Kathmandu. Some well known literary figures in Nepali language include Shankar Lamichhane and Keshab Raj Pindali.

LOHANI

Although the number of Lohanis in Nepal is small, they have produced such intellectuals as Gopi Nath (poet), Govinda Prasad (writer) and Prakash Chandra (politician).

MAINALI

Most of the Mainalis in the eastern part of Nepal migrated from Kumaon or Seti/Mahakali Zones to the village of Kanpur in Kabre District east of Kathmandu valley and to such places as Jhapa in later years.There have been such well known short story writers as Guru Prasad and communist politicians as Radha Krishna (RK) and Chandra Prasad (CP) among Mainalis.

LUINTEL

The name Luintel is probably derived from the village of Luintel situated in Gorkha District. Basudev Sharma is a well known writer in Nepali language who started a Prize for Nepali writers.

MISHRA

Mishra is a common surname used by three major groups of Brahmins in Nepal- *Purbia, Kumai* and *Maithil.* It is a very common surname among Maithil Brahmins in the state of Bihar in India.

PANT

Pants are found in Seti and Mahakali Zones in the far west as well as in Hungi village of Palpa and Chiti in Lamjung Districts where they migrated from Kumaon. Pants have produced some of the greatest Sanskrit scholars in Nepal including Neeldev, Bachaspati, Sukritidatta. In recent years, Naya Raj Pant, Yadab Prasad and Krishna Prasad have been well known historian and Sanskrit scholar, economist and lawyer respectively. According to Badri Datta Pandey, [23] Pants (Bharadwaj *gotra)* are supposed to have migrated from Maharashtra to Kumaon in the 10th century. There are two varieties of Pants- those who eat meat and those who don't.

PANDEY

It appears that no other surname among Brahmins has as many *gotras* as Pandeys. According to *Kumaon ka Itihas* [23], Pandey (Gautam *gotra)* migrated from Kangra in Himanchal Pradesh to Kumaon and then to eastern part of Nepal. Pandey (Kashyap *gotra*) migrated to Badakhola in Kumaon (near Bhimtal) from Kannauj in the Gangetic Plains in during the fifteenth century and Laxman migrated from Kumaon to such *Chaubisi* kingdoms as Tanahu and Palpa in the mid-seventeenth century. His son became the royal preceptor of King Narabhupal Shah, father of King Prithvi Narayan Shah. Bani Bilas was one of the greatest Sanskrit scholars in Nepal. In the year 1845, Bijaya Raj became the royal preceptor and the post remained in the family for 130 years. Hem Raj Sharma wrote the standard grammar in Nepali language and was a great Sanskrit scholar known by such foreign Sanskritists as Sylvian Levy, Tucci and Rahul Sankrityayan who called him "encyclopedia of Nepal". Pandey (Bharadwaj *gotra*) came to Kumaon from Prayag and later to eastern part of Nepal [23]. Pandey (Upamanyu *gotra)* were living in

Gorkha during the time of King Drabya Shah when the kingdom was founded and Kalu Pandey came from this category of Pandeys.

PATHAK

Pathak is a common surname among Brahmins in India in the state of UP and Gujrat. This surname is also found among Kumai Brahmins of Nepal. Pathak (Shandilya *gotra)* migrated from Awadh (Kannauj) to Kumaon[23].

PRASAI

Prasai Brahmins are found in small numbers in eastern hills of Nepal where they are supposed to have migrated from an area in Kumaon north of Kathgodam.

NEPAL

The surname Nepal is supposed to be derived from the village of Nepal in Dailkeh District. Among the well known Nepals have been such politicians as Ramhari Sharma (from Godavari in Kathmandu), Madhav Nepal (from Rautahaht in eastern Terai) and Pradeep Nepal (from Bhojpur in eastern hills) and Sanskrit scholars as Gyanmani.

PANDIT

Although the word Pandit signifies a learned man in Sanskrit, some Brahmins also use it as a surname. One such group lives in Tanahu District which had used the surname Khanal in the past and had belonged to *Ghritkaushik gotra.* They are supposed to have migrated there from Achham District in the Far West[26].

POKHREL

Pokhrel Brahmins have lived in Garhwal since the sixteenth century [16]. It is not known if the Pokhrels of Nepal migrated from there. There are two varieties- Pani Pokhrel and Dudh Pokhrel having different *gotras.*

PAUDEL

There are a large number of Paudels among Brahmins in Nepal. Perhaps the name Paudel was derived from the village of Paudi which is situated in Garhwal in the western Himalayas. They were also royal preceptors of Nepal in early Shah period and the well known Ranga Nath became the Prime Minister of Nepal for few years in pre-Kot Massacre period. Some well known Paudels in recent years include Ramchandra, the speaker of lower house of Parliament, and Modnath, communist leader and writer in Nepali and three generation of writers and journalists: Chiranjivi, Prem Raj (editor of Gorkhapatra) and Ram Raj.

REGMI

The name Regmi is derived from the village of Regam in Bajhang District. There has been Dilli Raman Regmi who is a well known scholar and politician and Mahesh Chandra Regmi also a scholar. Madan Regmi is a poet and writer in Nepali language.

RIJAL

The surname Rijal is derived from the village Rija situated near Jumla. Nagendra Prasad Rijal was once Prime Minister during the Panchayat period.

RIMAL

The surname Rimal is derived from the village Rima situated near Jumla in the Karnali Basin. Bishnuhari Rimal and Bishwa Nath Rimal were well known Sanskrit scholars during the Rana period.

SATYAL

Satyals acted as family priests of the Ranas. Ram Prasad Satyal was also a writer in Nepali language.

SIGDEL

The name Sigdel is supposed to be derived from the village Sigdi in Gulmi area. The most famous Sigdel in Nepal was Somnath who was a well known Sanskrit scholar who was also a writer in Nepali language.

SOTI

There are Soti Brahmins living in Garhwal region of western Himalayas in India who are supposed to have migrated from Gujrat in the eighth century[17]

SUBEDI

The name Subedi is supposed to be derived from the village of Subeda in Bajhang District in Seti Zone. There are Subedis living in the eastern part of Pokhara valley and in southwestern part of Kathmandu valley. Shikharnath Subedi was a well known poet. Navaraj Subedi was a politician during the Panchayat era and had been elected Chairman of National Panchayat for few years.

THAPALIA

There are Thapalia Brahmins living in Thapali village in Garhwal [17] who are supposed to be living there since the 9th century. There are also many Thapalias living in eastern part of Nepal who are Kumai Brahmins.

TIMILSINA

The name Timilsina is supposed to have originated from the village Timisen in Achham District.

TRIPATHI

Tripathis are supposed to have migrated from Gujrat to Kuamon and then to central Nepal.

UPRETI

Upretis are found in substantial numbers in Dandeldhura District from where they are supposed to have migrated to Kabhre District and to Kathmandu.

WAGLEY

It is interesting to note that there are Brahmins having surname Wagley in the state of Maharastra in India. It is possible that Wagleys in Nepal migrated from there. Chiranjibi Walgley was a Minister of Nepali Congress Party Government formed in 1991.

COMMON SURNAMES- SHARMA AND UPADHYAY

Some of the most common surnames used by Brahmins are **Sharma** and **Upadhayay.** Normally, only Brahmins are seen to be using these surnames. On the other hand, other surnames used by Brahmins could also be used by Chhetris if they happen to have a Brahmin ancestor. However, in most of such cases, the term *Bahadur* preceds the surname presumably to indicate the fact that the person is a Chhetri. Upadhyay as a surname is used by non-Jaisi Brahmins. On the other hand, both Jaisis and Upadhyays (both Purbia and Kumai) are known to use the surname Sharma which signifies all Brahmins. However, almost all of Brahmins who use Upadhay as surname also have another surname which they don't use. Dinesh Raj Pant has written about a group of Kumai Brahmins living in Gorkha District who don't have any other surname except Upadhayay.[27] The word Upadhaya in Sanskrit means "teacher".

The legal code *MULKI AIN* published in the year 1934 stated that both Purbia Upadhayay Brahmins and Kumai Upadhyay Brahmins were prohibited from eating onion and garlic which is reproduced as follows.

> ४ नं. ॥ ॥ पुर्वीया उपाध्याय ब्राह्मण र पुराना कुमाञि ठपा ध्याय ब्राह्मणले लशुन, छ्यापी, प्याज, च्याउ, रामभिडा, घरहास, परा सका फूल जान्नी जानी खाए अनाचार ठहर्छ, दण्ड हुन्छ; पतिया गर्‍ा भातमा चल्छ पतिया भए पछि मनाहालें खाएनन गने, जरीवन्ना गरी. त्यसका हातको भात सुवा दिन्. पतिया नभई जानी जानी खानेला सी सजाय भई पतिया पाउँछ.

Anthropologist Dor Bahadur Bista [28] has written that Upadhaya Brahmins are divided into two kinds- Purbia and Kumai. Shukra Raj Shastri [29] has also written that there are two varieties of Upadhayay Brahmins- Purbia and Kumai.

It is also interesting to note that some Brahmins use the term *Shastri* which could either mean that they had studied Sanskrit upto the level of Shastri or they were learned men well versed in scriptures (Shastras)

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GLOSSARY

Bahun	Nepali name for Brahmins
Bratabandha	A ceremony when a Brahmin boy is given a "sacred thread" and becomes formally "twice born" or Brahmin
Gotra	All Brahmins claim to be descended from one of the ancient sages (Rishis) which is indicated by their *gotra*
Janai	Nepali term for sacred thread worn by Brahmins
Janai Purne	Full moon day in the Nepalese month of *Shravan* when all Brahmins change a new *Janai*
Jaisi	Offspring of a Upadhyay Brahmin and widow which are given lower status than Brahmins
Kriya	A thirteen day mourning observed by Brahmins for their parents
Kumai	Brahmins who form the predominant group in the hilly region west of Karnali River and who migrated in eastern part of Nepal either from there or from Kumaun region of India west of Mahakali River.
Magar	A group of people living in west central part of Nepal. Two thirds of Magars speak Nepali as their mother tongue and many employ Brahmin priests
Maithil	Brahmins living in the eastern Terai region of Nepal between Kosi and Bagmati River and in northern Bihar State in India
Purbia	Brahmins living in the hilly region east of Karnali River and west of the eastern border of Nepal who form the largest group among Brahmins in Nepal
Rajopadhaya	Newari speaking Brahmins in Kathmandu valley who form the priestly class for high caste Hindu Newars
Sarayuparin	Brahmins living in the central Terai in Lumbini Zone
Shraddha	Ceremony performed annually to pay respects to dead parents
Tagadhari	Those who wear the sacred thread
Teej	A festival celebrated by hill Brahmin women in Nepalese month of *Bhadra* (August)
Upadhyay	A category of highest class hill Brahmins among both *Purbia* and *Kumai*. They have right to perform priestly functions

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About the Author

Prakash A.Raj was born in Nepal in a Brahmin family and his grandfather was a Sanskrit scholar who had collected one of two largest private libraries in Nepal. He studied in the holy city of Varanasi in India for two years as had been customary in his family for seven generations. He spent five years in the early 60's at university in Michigan, Nevada and Massachusetts. He later studied for one year in the Netherlands and travelled extensively in Europe. In Nepal he has worked on the English language daily as a journalist and has also worked for the planning agency of the Nepalese government. He later worked for five years for the United Nations in New York and in Pakistan. He is also co-author of *Lonely Planet's* India- A Travel Survival Kit which received Thomas Cook Best Guidebook of the Year award in 1982.

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Brahmins of NEPAL

Although Brahmins are one of the most important ethnic groups in Nepal which has provided not only Hindu priests and Sanskrit scholars but also most of Nepal's communist leaders, there are few books written about this caste. This book written by a well known Travel Writer of Nepal provides information on their origin, customs and role in national integration of Nepal.

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